

## **IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS VALUES: A PANACEA TO SUSTAINABLE SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on Igbo traditional religious values as a panacea to the security challenges in Nigeria. Since the Maitatsine riots of 1980 to the present activities of Boko Haram, Nigeria has witnessed conflicts and riots which have claimed many lives and property destroyed. Successive Nigerian government has spent huge sums of money to introduce many security measure to deal with insecurity in the nation which is yet to yield the desired dividend. The researchers wish to introduce the Igbo traditional religious value as a solution to the insecurity problem in the country. In achieving this, this paper uses secondary and internet sources.

**KEYWORDS:** Boko Haram, Religious Values, Policy and Strategic Studies

### **INTRODUCTION**

The nation; Nigeria is presently known for insecurity globally. The rate with which insecurity is being experienced, is alarming and worrisome too. No day passes without a report of insecurity situation. Nigerians are no longer sure of being alive by next second. People now live in fear and at the mercy of the perpetrators of the heinous activities. Such heinous activities which have brought about insecurity in Nigeria are; religious/tribal conflict, hostage taken and kidnapping. The most worrisome is the recent activities of an Islamic sect known as *Boko Haram*. It was reported on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2012, that the activities of this Islamic sect have led to the death of three hundred eight persons in their one hundred and eighteen attacks on six northern states ([www.thenationonline.com](http://www.thenationonline.com)), unquantifiable business and property lost in these attacks not included.

In the south the security situation is not better. The cases of kidnapping, hostage taken and armed robbery is on the increase. The researcher has just began this work when he received a call that one of his childhood friends was kidnapped in Owerri. In all these anti-security vices ravaging the nation, many lives have been lost, in addition to the damage done to the nation's economy. The kind of insecurity being experienced in contemporary Nigerian society, was not witnessed in traditional days. The traditional religious values inculcated in the members of the society the sense of human value, human dignity and sanctity of human life which led to a secure society.

The objective of this paper is to show that the inculcation of traditional religious values could be a panacea to sustainable security in Nigeria. The researcher therefore uses Igbo traditional religion to examine these traditional religious values.

The people of the Igbo are found on the south-east of Nigeria. They are found in the following states; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo and extends to some parts of Delta and Rivers States. The April, 2006 census figure, places their population to be between 20 and 25 million (Onuigbo;2009). Oguejiofor in Ugwu (2002) argues that

Igbo communities are linked by a common language (different dialects notwithstanding), common traditional religious beliefs (though with variations) and many cultural values that differentiate them from other tribes in Nigeria. The people of Igbo have rich traditional religious values and life is patterned along these traditional values. However, (Ezekwugo; 1992) posits that the Igbo are among the least known of cultural potential and traditional values. Ilogu (1985) sees people of Igbo as a culture group.

This paper is set to discuss the traditional religious values of this group which if inculcated in the citizens of Nigeria, will bring about sustainable security in the nation.

Traditional religion (Africa) has been defined in various ways by scholars. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004), Iwuagwu (1998) and Madu (1996) see it as the religion practiced by the people (Africans). This religion existed and was practiced prior to the advent of alien religions; Christianity and Islam. Ugwu (2002:117) then defines traditional religion as; “beliefs and practices enshrined in the sinews and marrows of the Igbo people transmitted through myths, proverbs, folklores, pithy sayings, meaning of God’s name (oral sources) and through objects and paraphernalia of worship (non-oral sources) from one generation to another”. The traditional Igbo man apply religion in whatever he does; hence he is a religious being. No wonder (Mbiti;1969:) posits that Africans (the Igbo inclusive) are “notoriously religious”.

Values are “general ideas or common ideas that members of a society share about what is good or bad; desirable or undesirable; commendable or not; worthy or not” (Igbo & Anugwom; 2007:59). Traditional values are transmitted and to great extent, influence peoples attitudes and behaviors. Values are acquired consciously or unconsciously; consciously through education and unconsciously by society’s influence.

Security has to do with not only defending the nation, but also protecting the citizenry from both internal and external attack. Security is vital so that nation may not lose her sovereignty and core values such as life and property (Akpuru-Aja:1999). In traditional Igbo society, they knew the importance of security and such values which ensured their security was inculcated on the members of the society.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF INSECURITY SITUATIONS IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria became an independent nation on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960 and also got her republic status on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1963. It was not long after the independence that stage for insecurity situation was set for the nation. The military in their desire to control the nation, interrupted the first republic with coup on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966. The Prime minister; Abubakar Tafawa Balewaa was killed. However, the regime of this government led by Major General Aguiyi Ironsi did not last (coup of January was seen as Igbo affair) as he was toppled six months after in another coup on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1966. Some northern officers who conceived January coup and killing as mainly Igbo army affairs, saw the July coup as an opportunity for retaliation. Many Igbo people both in the northern and the southern parts of Nigeria lost their life and property. This led to face off between the Igbo and the rest of the nation, and the inability to settle the misunderstanding led to civil war which lasted for thirty months (06<sup>th</sup> July, 1967- 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1970), and the war is said to have claimed about one million persons (Eze;2008).

However, about a decade after the civil war another monster and threat to security emerged in the name of ethno-religious conflict. In more three decades (1980-2012), Nigeria witnessed unprecedented ethno-religious crises which includes among others;

- 1980 to 1982 Maitasine religious crises in Kano
- 1987 Kafanchan crises
- 1992 religious crises in Bauchi
- 1992 Zangon Kataf crises
- 1998 to 2000 crises in Okitipupa of Ondo
- 1999 crises between the Hausa and Yoruba in Shagamu of Ogun
- 1999 to 2000 crises in Kano
- 1999 to 2002 conflict between Wukari in Taraba State and Takum in Benue State
- 2000 to 2001 crises in Burutu of Dealt State
- 2000 crises between Umuleri and Aguleri in Anambra State
- 2000 to 2001 crises between Modakeke and Ife in Osun State
- 2001-2012 crises in Jos Plateau State.

These crises have led to the lose of thousands of lives and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. This is what situation of insecurity could cause.

As the nation was still battling with the ethno-religious conflict, kidnapping and hostage took the stage and added to the insecurity situation in the country. Both in the northern and southern parts of the nation (though more pronounced in the south) men and women both old and young, rich especially the rich, were kidnapped and ransom demanded before they are released. What began as hostage taken against the foreign workers in the Niger Dealt area soon spread like whirl fire to other parts of Nigeria. It has been reported that by first half of 2011, 512 kidnappings was reported as against 353 cases in 2010 ([www.globalpost.com/dispatch/kidnapping -culture](http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/kidnapping-culture)). The recent surge in kidnapping in Nigeria, made the nation to be rated as “the world top eight kidnapping hotspots along side war zone and failed states such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia...” ([www.globalpost.com/dispatch/kidnapping-culture](http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/kidnapping-culture)). Kidnapping indeed constitutes insecurity as lives have been lost in some cases and valuables lost by the kidnapped, apart from physical and sociological trauma suffered by the kidnapped and the relatives.

The case of conflict and hostage/kidnapping was going on simultaneously, when another hydra headed insecurity case; *Boko Haram* emerged. This Islamic Sect which began in 2002 (Onwuamaeze; 2011), has constituted an unbearable insecurity risk in Nigeria. The Police Affairs Minister in ministerial platform on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2012 announced that *Boko Haram* killed three hundred and eight in their one hundred and eighteen attacks on six northern states which includes; Bauchi, Borno, Kaduna, Niger, Yobe and Plateau ([www.nationonline.com](http://www.nationonline.com)). This number is higher bearing in mind that the activities of this sect in Abuja was not mentioned.

However, it should be noted that armed robbery, child trafficking, etc have constituted threat to the security of the nation. Also, some who have evil instinct have used the insecurity situation to perpetrate evil thereby compounding the problem of insecurity in the nation. Having looked at the activities in Nigeria which have constituted insecurity situation, the paper is set to discuss those Igbo traditional religious values if inculcated by the citizens, will sanitize the nation's



security system. The Igbo traditional religious agents used in the inculcation of traditional values, shall form part of this work.

## THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS VALUES AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE

The people of Igbo from time immemorial, fashioned out ways of living which helped them in maintaining a secured society. This is not to say that there was no insecurity challenges in their own time; it was minimal. The imagination and perception of the world (world view), was of great importance in shaping their behavioral pattern of life. The totality of Igbo value is anchored on communalism. Communal values according to Gyekye (1996);

are those values that express appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behaviours that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good. Examples of such communal values are sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony p.35.

He then defines communalism as “the doctrine or theory that the community (or group) is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society (Gyekye;1996:36). Madukwe and Madukwe (2010) also see communalism as;

an offshoot of extended family system where there is interconnectedness among the members of the community, there is care for one by all. There is the bearing of one another’s burden and everyone is his brother’s keeper. The have help those who do not have so that no one perishes because of wants while his next door neighbour live in affluence. There is sharing of virtually everything p.279.

Communalism therefore could be seen as the practice of communal values. This practice helps to ensure social security in traditional Igbo society.

The sense of communal value dominates the life of the Igbo. The Igbo understand morality as society’s affair. Ilogu (1985) posits that Igbo moral code emphasis group morality rather than on individual. Okwueze (2003:68) supports this view when he avers that emphasis on traditional morality “is on group morality rather than on individual cultivation of goodness”. The Igbo morality form *omenala* (customary) gives different aspects of behavioral pattern approved, which also shows aspects of attitude not accepted by the society. Morality in traditional society according to Okwueze (2003), aims at achieving social harmony this leads to social security.

The child upbringing in Igbo land, is a society’s concern. It is the belief that the child belong to all (*nwa bu nwa oha*). This view is held by Mbiti (1969), Ugwu (2002) and Nwala (2010). Due to the fact that “all traditional societies have a strong dose of orientation... (Opata;1998:88), members of the Igbo society see it as their duty to combine effort to ensure that every child is adequately nurtured. Early enough, the traditional values are inculcated in the child. Knowing that the society stands to suffer if any member becomes a nuisance which may threaten their security, the society then control the conduct of her members by inculcating in them the societal values. These values among other things are; respect for elders, kindness, humility, truthfulness, hospitality, hard work and chastity before marriage.

In order to ensure the security of their society, members of traditional Igbo society are trained to be responsible and productive. Hard work is a virtue inculcated on the people; laziness is abhorred. This is why the people of Igbo are

industrious. Sylvia Leith Ross in Ugwu (2002:118) describes the industrious nature of the Igbo thus; “the Igbo reserved the purest scorn for the lazy and the incompetent”. “The idle mind is the devil’s workshop” because it could lead to deviant behaviours as a result, those lazy were cajoled and ridiculed by both mortal (human) and immortal (masquerade). Shame such ridicule brings deter members of the traditional Igbo society from being lazy and there was less *ofeke* or *efulefu* (never do well) in their mist.

The most important traditional religious value instilled on the members of Igbo society is the sense of human dignity and sanctity of human life. It was a heinous crime to kill a clan’s man. The perpetrator is condemned if it is a willful act, or goes into exile if it is unconsciously done. Achebe (2008) gives a vivid instance of how killing of a clan’s man was taken in traditional Igbo society in *Things fall apart* using the character Okonkwo when he avers that;

the only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The was of two kinds, male or female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years p.99.

It may be argued that human sacrifice was performed in traditional societies. One should not also forget that it was done on demand by their god(s) for their security and this was done once in a while. Human life was precious and sanctity of human life was appreciated because a relation does not see the blood of the other (*nwanne adighi ahu obara nwanne ya*). When there is sense of human value and sanctity of human life, security is ensured to a large extent. These Igbo traditional religious values among others, gave their traditional society the needed security. It is therefore necessary that these values be imbibed by the contemporary Nigerian citizens as a way of solving the security challenges facing her.

## THE IGBO RELIGIOUS AGENTS IN THE INCULCATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

The Africans which people of Igbo are part of, are “notoriously religious” (Mbiti;1969:1). The religious nature of the Igbo man makes every thing they does to be anchored on the Supreme Being and his assistants- the divinities. Ugwu (2002:1) notes that “god and these spiritual agents constitute a formidable array of forces in inculcation of moral values...”. Beginning from traditional system of government to social life and every other thing they do, are all linked to the Super natural Being. Agalamanyi (2004:230) posits that “there was infusion of religious and political authority in the traditional society”. The family head (father and husband), priests, seers, prophets, diviners, and council of elders are seen as “doyen and repositories of the customs and traditions of the Igbo society” (Ugwu; 2002:120). These religious leaders knew their worth and lived righteously which impacted traditional values on their society. Younger generation therefore emulated their righteous behavioral pattern of life and are influenced.

However, an aspect of agent of inculcating traditional values that is vital is the agents of socialization. Some of these agents of socialization are the family, age grade (peer group) and traditional Igbo religion. Odo (1990:10) describes agents of socialization as “major avenues for getting the child to properly belong to the society”. Fletcher in Igbo and Anugwom (2007:78) then define socialization as “the process by which society transmits its culture from one generation to the next and adopts the individual to the accepted and approved ways of organized social life”.

The family is the foremost agent of socialization. This is where basic and initial training which helps other agents of socialization to inculcate Igbo traditional values is received. The family inculcates in the child the appropriate moral

values of the society. Being the vanguard of morality in Igbo society, the family teaches the child to avoid social unacceptable habits such as lies, disrespect for the elders, stealing, laziness etc.

The child gets into the society from the family having been inculcated with the vital values that may help him fit into the wider society. Outside the family, the child is expected to belong to the age grade (peer group).

The age grade plays an important role in stamping the cultural mark of the society on the members. Okwueze (2004:244) asserts that “the age grade system is an indispensable structure in the complex function of maintaining/enforcing the morality and values of the community. ... age grade sees it as a sacred duty to make their members responsible moral beings who respect the values of their society”. To achieve this, those who show deviant behaviors were cajoled, ridiculed, punished, ostracized, disgraced publicly, exiled or banished by the age grade or the society.

Moreso, Igbo traditional religion is an important agent in inculcation of traditional values. Every thing the Igbo do has religious undertone and Igbo religion has given oracle position. Oracle exists in traditional Igbo society with different names in their various communities such as *Adoro Ero* of Alor-uno, *Ogwugwu* of Okija, *Ibini Ukpabi* of Arochukwu etc. The oracle is believed to visit those with deviant behaviour and violators of societal moral standards with calamity. In addition, the oracle which unleash horror on evil people is used for oath-taken against a suspected culprit (*Ikpo arusi*). Any person found guilty is visited with pestilence or death, loses property including land, and the dead body of the culprit taken to the oracle. In some cases, the family partakes in the oracles punishment. The agents of socialization do a lot in inculcating the Igbo traditional values. The dare consequences of showing deviant behaviour therefore make every member to obey the societal values and the society is secured.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Having looked at the insecurity situations in Nigeria and established that the traditional Igbo religious values was of immense benefit in achieving security in Igbo traditional days, the paper therefore gives the following recommendations.

- Nigerians should strive to be religious like the Igbo traditional forebears. This will enable Nigerians to adhere to their religious tenets.
- Respect for human dignity and sanctity of human life should be emulated from the members of traditional Igbo society by Nigerians.
- Measures used by traditional Igbo society in dealing with deviant attitudes which threaten their security should be applied in handling security challenges in Nigeria no matter who is involved. These methods are; ridicule, public disgrace, etc.
- The Igbo traditional values should be incorporated into the educational curriculum of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. A course on traditional values should be developed and made general course in every Nigerian tertiary institution.
- Award on best behaved child should be introduced in all levels of education. Where it exists, it should be strengthened to include scholarship and automatic employment. This will spur Nigerians to cherish moral behavioural pattern.



- Nigerian leaders should emulate the good leadership qualities of the traditional Igbo religious leaders. It is hoped that if these recommendations are taken by Nigerians, sustainable security will be achieved in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSIONS

Security is vital for the continued existence of any nation. The security challenges presently is threatening the cooperate existence of Nigeria. Traditional Igbo society was able to achieve relative security due to their traditional values (the values has religious undertone) which was inculcated into the members of their society. If sustainable security will be achieved in Nigeria for her continued existence as a corporate entity, the Igbo traditional values should be imbibed.

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